



Part 1: News Analysis

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On the eve of a high-profile human rights dialogue with the European Union, Turkmenistan dismayed those hoping for progress on promised reforms by rounding up civil society activists, journalists, and their relatives, sending a grim message that the government refuses to go beyond the rhetoric of human rights and will punish those who highlight the discrepancy between its declarations and its actions.

Sazak Durdymuradov, a contributor to RFE/RL's Turkmen Service (Radio Azatlyk), was seized by Turkmen police from his home in Bakharden and later beaten and tortured, according to his relatives. He has become well known for his frequent broadcasts on history and constitutional reform issues. Osman Hallyev, Radio Azatlyk's Lebap correspondent, said he was placed under virtual house arrest and his son was expelled from university in retaliation for his father's journalistic work. Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, a civic activist and frequent guest on Radio Azatlyk was warned he could face psychiatric institutionalization, his home was targeted in an arson attempt, and his son was removed from a summer camp for top students.

This pattern of intimidation and harassment, ranging from outright detention and torture to harassment of people in retaliation for their relatives' activism is drawn straight from the practices of past dictator Saparmurat Niyazov. Whereas the Turkmen authorities may show a cooperative face to European visitors, promising that government-created commissions and technical assistance projects will advance an ambitious agenda of the rule of law, in practice, they seem willing to violate their existing laws to terrorize dissenters who call attention to the gap between the rhetoric and the reality.

In 2006, the European Union declined to sign a trade agreement with Turkmenistan, citing serious human rights concerns, and creating a list of benchmarks for progress, ranging from the release of political prisoners, to granting access to the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit prisons, to permitting NGOs and independent media to function freely. While amnesties of prisoners, often near the end of their term, have been made, and a few high-profile political cases have been resolved, usually with immense pressure from the international community, new cases continue to appear and independent NGOs are nowhere closer to operating openly. The Turkmen government made a show of closing a prison this week in a ceremony attended by foreign guests, however, the ICRC is still not allowed into the country. Meanwhile, the EU has weakened its leverage by softening condemnation of such practices after signing an agreement last month for gas delivery.

In another instance echoing the practices of past dictator Niyazov, families were reported by RFE/RL as having been forced to leave their homes and resettle in remote areas such as the new Ruhubelent district which the government wants to develop. The authorities seem motivated by a desire to clear the area surrounding the border with Uzbekistan.

Some reforms within Turkmenistan inch forward, but with uncertain outcomes. At a government meeting, the Turkmen education minister reported that this year, about 10 percent more students graduated from university or specialized secondary schools than in 2007. Eighteen new areas of study will be offered in Turkmen educational establishments, ranging from foreign languages, international relations, global economics, international law, and international journalism. Environmental sciences and performing arts are being added as well. The president is now concerned about job opportunities for the graduates and has urged the ministries to generate more jobs. Increasingly, young people who can, try to leave Turkmenistan for

opportunities abroad. Perhaps to curb this trend, the government offered half-price air tickets to Turkmen students studying in Turkey to encourage them to return home for the summer.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkmen-EU Dialogue on Human Rights Opens in Ashgabat

Original title: Turkmenistan-EU: Humanitarian Sphere -- Important Priority for Cooperation

Source: Official Turkmen government website/Turkmen State News Agency (TDH)/06/24/08. Translation and excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=5&id=080624c>

Excerpt: Human rights protection issues were discussed during the 9th special meeting of the Turkmenistan-EU Joint Committee at the Turkmen Presidential National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights.

[Passage omitted: on the EU delegation’s arrival in Ashgabat and Turkmen government ministries participating in the dialogue.]

[Passage omitted: on President Berdymukhamedov’s concept of “the state for the people” and the US \$4 billion plan for regional development, including construction of schools, factories, and cultural centers.]

During the meeting, a thorough exchange of opinions took place about the importance of the reforms initiated by the Turkmen leader, based on international collaboration, including with the EU.

Participants in the meeting noted with satisfaction that, as Turkmenistan successfully integrated into the global political, economic and legal space, it was giving special attention to the formation of civil society and to the development of democratic institutions. Turkmenistan is undertaking real steps to improve national legislation and bring it in compliance with international standards.

Major, multi-faceted work is underway in Turkmenistan, the chief purpose of which is the people's welfare, the strengthening of the best democratic traditions in Turkmen society, and the creation of real guarantees for the implementation of the individual political, economic, social and other rights of its citizens. Also appreciated was the Turkmen leader's initiative to create special commissions to review citizens' appeals on law-enforcement agencies and ensure Turkmenistan's compliance with international human rights. The role of the Constitutional Commission in updating the Basic Law was also emphasized.

Smildjan Knez, an official of the Slovak Foreign Ministry, which currently chairs the EU, expressed great appreciation for the progressive reforms initiated by President Berdymukhamedov, stating that the EU welcomes Turkmenistan's steps in this direction. The EU representative also stressed that promotion and

protection of human rights was one of the main goals of the EU's strategy for cooperation with the countries in the region, and noted that these issues were raised last spring during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU troika and the countries of Central Asia. The EU representatives expressed full support for Turkmenistan's active efforts to strengthen the rule of law as an important condition of the prosperity and sustainable development of the country. The EU expressed readiness to provide Turkmenistan comprehensive support for reforms, taking into account the priorities of the government's program for development.

[Passage omitted: on President Berdymukhamedov's past visit to Brussels which had taken the EU-Turkmenistan relationship to a new level; on exchanges of wishes for further cooperation.]

b. RFE/RL Contributor in Turkmenistan Detained, Beaten and Tortured

Source: Press release via e-mail by RFE/RL/06/24/08. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Excerpt: A contributor to RFE/RL's Turkmen Service (Radio Azatlyk) was found beaten and tortured in Bakharden, Turkmenistan on June 24 for refusing to sign a letter in which he agreed to stop reporting for RFE/RL.

On June 21, Sazak Durdymuradov, a history teacher whose commentary and analysis for Radio Azatlyk often focuses on educational and constitutional reform, was seized by Turkmen police from his home in Bakharden. Upon discovering Durdymuradov today at a detention facility run by the national security office (former KGB), his wife said he told her he "wanted to die."

This incident occurred as the Turkmenistan government was hosting a "Dialogue on Human Rights" with the European Union in the nation's capital, Ashgabat. "This is a hideous incident, made all the more so by the fact that President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov's government was engaged in an EU dialogue about human rights at the same time that Mr. Durdymuradov was being tortured by its agents," said RFE/RL president Jeffrey Gedmin. "The only appropriate response to this act is condemnation. I call on the EU and international community to hold Turkmenistan accountable for its human rights abuses, and not allow the government to escape censure with empty promises of reform."

[Passages omitted: on the release of Amnesty International's report on the government's targeting of independent journalists; on the rise of Turkmen governmental intimidation and harassment of RFE/RL journalists.]

c. Turkmen-EU Human Rights Dialogue Should Not Be "Fig Leaf": Amnesty

Original title: EU-Turkmenistan: Move From Words to Action

Source: Amnesty International/06/23/08. Press release via email.

Full version: <http://www.amnesty-eu.org/static/documents/2008/Turkmenistan230608.pdf>

EU delegates attending the first full Human Rights Dialogue with Turkmenistan June 24 in Ashgabat should press authorities to honor their international human rights obligations.

In a new report launched June 24, *Turkmenistan: No Effective Human Rights Reform*, Amnesty International concludes there continue to be widespread and systematic violations of human rights, and impunity pervades for police, security services and other government authorities, despite promises by the government of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov to protect human rights.

"A fundamental part of the EU-Central Asia strategy is centered on Human Rights Dialogues. To be coherent, the participants of tomorrow's [June 24] meeting must demonstrate that human rights are an integral part of their interactions – and not a fig leaf behind which either side is free to privilege economic cooperation" said Nicolas Beger, Amnesty International EU Office Director.

Amnesty International's key human rights concerns include:

* The enforced disappearance of dozens of prisoners labeled as "traitors of the motherland" by the authorities, who were sentenced in unfair trials to prison terms of between five years and life in connection with an alleged coup attempt in November 2002;

* The harassment, interrogation and arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, other independent civil society activists and journalists;

* The severe restriction of religious freedom;

* The courts are heavily dependent on the executive branch and a fundamental reform of the judiciary is urgently needed to strengthen the rule of law in the country;

* Law enforcement officers and prison guards have allegedly subjected detainees and prisoners to torture or other ill-treatment in many cases, sometimes even leading to death in custody. Impunity for such human rights violations is the norm in Turkmenistan.

d. Activists, Journalists Harassed Ahead of EU-Turkmen Human Rights Meeting

Original title: *Turkmenistan: Activists, Journalists Harassed Ahead Of EU Meeting*

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/06/24/08. Copyright (c) 2008. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/06/8b26dc3e-04ac-4098-92a5-c54b11c75aef.html>

Excerpt: [Passage omitted: on the report by Amnesty International on "widespread and systematic violations of human rights," including the targeting of independent journalists and activists in Turkmenistan on the eve of the first Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and Turkmenistan.]

Another human rights group, the Vienna-based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), voiced similar concerns. TIHR wrote on June 23 that "public activists, journalists, and some unwanted individuals continue to be repeatedly persecuted," adding that "repressions have recently [been] exacerbated." TIHR also said that RFE/RL's Turkmen Service correspondents based in the country are subject to persecution by law enforcement agencies. "The persecution methods used by the special services range from cutting off correspondents' telephones to explicit threats and intimidation of the correspondents and their relatives, including children," the group said.

[Passage omitted: on Amnesty's appeal to the EU to press for human rights concerns not as a "fig leaf" for economic cooperation.]

Turkmenistan-based correspondents and contributors to RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, or Radio Azatlyk, say intimidation and harassment have increased in recent days. Sazak Durdymuradov, a regular contributor to RFE/RL's Turkmen programs, was detained and reportedly ill-treated in prison. His relatives say police detained Durdymuradov at his house in the town of Baharden, some 200 kilometers west of Ashgabat, on June 20. He was first taken to a psychiatric clinic in the town of Bezmein near Ashgabat. But when family members went to Bezmein to visit him on June 21, they did not find him there, and did not learn of his whereabouts until today.

[Passage omitted: on Durdymuradov's relatives' report of his beating; on his reported announcement of a hunger strike and transfer to a psychiatric clinic.]

Osman Hallyev, Radio Azatlyk's correspondent in Lebap Province, says he has been under virtual house arrest since last week.

"Even though they did not officially tell me, I have been under house arrest," Hallyev says. "My mobile phones were cut off. They have been watching my house for 24 hours from four sides. If I leave the house, they follow me. There are police officers among them. The situation is getting worse hour by hour. Even my grandchildren, who have to go to kindergarten, are afraid to go out."

[Passage omitted: on the expulsion of Hallyev's son, Umut, from university and the authorities' pressure on the university administration to warn the son about potential retaliation should his father continue his cooperation with RFE/RL.]

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, a civic activist from the western Turkmen city of Balkanabad and a frequent guest on Radio Azatlyk, has also been targeted by Turkmen authorities. In the June 23 report, Amnesty wrote that police had visited Durdykuliev at his home and written "recommendations" that he undergo a psychiatric check-up, and that an attempt had been made to burn down the activist's house.

[Passage omitted: on the forcible removal of Durdykuliev's 10-year-old son from a summer camp for top students in retaliation for his father's activism.]

e. Turkmen Émigré Group Urges EU to Press for Human Rights Compliance

Original Title: Press Release by the TIHR on the Forthcoming Turkmenistan-European Union Meeting

Source: Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights/06/23/08. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0258044201000000000000011000000>

Excerpt: Many people are assuming that the new Turkmen authorities are instituting a number of reforms, such as educational reforms, expanded Internet access and amendments to some laws, and that the government intends to adopt a revised Constitution. At a meeting between Turkmenistan and the EU this week, the Turkmen government will likely emphasize these types of positive reforms -- in an attempt to prove its commitment to democratic change at the «Turkmenistan - European Union» meeting, which is scheduled to take place this week.

[Passages omitted: to raise awareness in the EU, human rights organizations are reporting on the gap between the government's declarations and its continued harassment of activists and.]

Andrey Zatoka, a civic activist and environmentalist sentenced to prison in early 2007 and pardoned later that year, continues to be harassed by the special services. In early June, the Ministry of the National Security prevented him from leaving the country to participate in an international meeting of environmental experts. Zatoka is one of many residents of Turkmenistan deprived of such freedom of movement.

Ovaz Annaev and his family are also denied travel. Annaev's is a relative of Turkmen opposition member Khudaiberdy Orazov. The Turkmen special services considered this to be solid grounds to prevent him from leaving the country. On June 15, the staff members of the Immigration Service prevented Annaev from leaving for Moscow to receive medical treatment.

Civic activist Valery Pal was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in May 2008 on trumped-up charges. Not satisfied with such a severe punishment, on June 16 the law-enforcement authorities seized his property without a court order.

Correspondents of RFE/RL's Turkmen Service are regularly harassed by law-enforcement agencies, who cut off their phones or explicitly threaten and intimidate them and their relatives.

[Passages omitted: on the gap between the government's claims of change and their real actions, and hope that the EU will urge Turkmenistan to respect human rights in practice.]

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. More University Students Graduate in Turkmenistan; President Urges Job Placement

Original title: Specific Measure and Effective Control to Education Reforms

Source: Official Turkmen government website/Turkmen State News Agency (TDH)/06/25/08. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12988&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: [Passage omitted: on president Berdymukhamedov's chairing of an enlarged Cabinet of Ministers meeting to address educational issues; on the silkworm harvest.]

Then the President gave the floor to Minister of Education M. Annaamanov who reported on preparations for the enrollment campaign at public universities and specialized secondary schools. The Minister reported that 13,800 young people currently studied at institutions of higher education and 3,900 at specialized secondary schools. This year, 667 young people graduated from universities, including the Turkmen State Medical Institute, the Turkmen State Academy of Fine Arts and the International Turkmen-Turkish University; 1,512 young people graduated from specialized secondary schools. Minister Annaamanov said graduates would be placed in jobs at the request of educational institutions, ministries and departments. The minister submitted proposals to increase student enrollment for universities and specialized secondary schools to meet the demand of various sectors for highly-qualified specialists and to introduce new subjects at educational establishments.

This year, 4,000 students will enroll in university, 385 more than in 2007; 1,716 students will enroll in specialized secondary schools, 98 more than 2007.

Eighteen new areas of study will be introduced at universities. These include Italian language and literature and Chinese language and literature at the Magtymguly Turkmen State University; Korean and Spanish at the Azadi Turkmen National Institute of World Languages; agrochemistry and soil science, plant protection, land reclamation mechanization, and animal husbandry at the Turkmen Agricultural University; world financial markets and insurance at the Turkmen State Institute of Economy and Development; circus and variety arts at the Turkmenistan Institute of Culture; international law, international relations and diplomacy, international economic relations, and international journalism at the Institute of International Affairs; commerce, world financial markets, and industrial engineering at the International Turkmen-Turkish University.

[Passages omitted: on Vice Premier Geldimyradov's report on job placement for graduates; on President Berdymukhamedov's invocation of a new historical era and the dependency of all reforms on educational reform; on government investments in computer equipment for universities; on the president's instructions to the Ministry of Economy and Development to find either employment or student loans to support graduate studies, including study abroad, for 115,000 graduates this year.]

[Passages omitted: on ministerial reports on rail construction, book-publishing, foreign periodicals, the fight against drug-trafficking and consumer protection.].

b. Turkmenistan Demolishes Prison, Citing Drop in Crime Rates

Source: AP/06/25/08. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.pr-inside.com/turkmenistan-demolishes-prison-citing-r664581.htm>

Synopsis: The Turkmen government demolished a prison on June 25, citing a sharp drop in crime rates, although human rights activists dismissed the move as propaganda, AP reported. "This is the first time in Turkmenistan's history that a prison has been torn down," Interior Minister Ovazgeldy Amanmuradov said at a ceremony attended by a number of international diplomats, the wire service reported him as saying. The facility in the port city of Turkmenbashi held up to 690 inmates.

The Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights dismissed the move as a distraction from failure to make real reforms. "Whenever the government does something positive, they don't present it as the solution to a problem but simply as a propaganda exercise to show what a good job it is doing," Tadzhiagul Begmedova, director of the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, was quoted as saying.

The government has released more than 10,000 prisoners in amnesties since coming to power, but Human Rights Watch said in a report issued this week that hundreds of unjustly imprisoned people remain in jails, and political opponents are harassed, AP reported.

c. Border Residents Forcefully Relocated to New District in Turkmenistan

Original Title: Turkmenistan: Border Residents Forcibly Relocated To New District

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/06/23/08. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036. Excerpt by OSI Turkmenistan Project
Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/06/24e608d8-64bc-4ebe-9a04-a0a4441679e7.html>

Excerpt: A listener of RFE/RL's Turkmen Service from the Niyazov district of the northern Dashoguz region sent a text message last week complaining about being forced to leave his house. He said he knows about dozens of other families being removed from their homes in the Niyazov, Turkmenbashi, Koneurgench, Gubadag, and Gorogly districts and forced to move to other parts of the country. "Local authorities ordered residents to move out before September. They said there won't be electricity and gas supplies after the deadline," he wrote.

He and several other listeners who contacted RFE/RL's Turkmen Service in recent weeks have added that no one received financial compensation for their property loss or to relocate. Local officials did offer some of them temporary shelter in an old school and a cultural center until they build their own houses. Another listener told RFE/RL's Turkmen Service about a meeting he and his fellow villagers had with the district deputy governor. He said police standing at the door threatened villagers with arrest when they tried to ask questions about receiving financial compensation for their lost properties.

Tajigul Begmedova, the head of the Bulgaria-based Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, says the authorities' actions are illegal. She says that "forceful relocation...is a violation of law and a violation of human rights. It also contradicts international law. And I think it is a hypocritical policy."

[Passage omitted: on the March 2007 presidential decree to create the new district of Ruhubelent and the determination of authorities to populate it; on the government claim that 2,000 families moved to the area and on popular skepticism that the move was voluntary, given the area's harsh desert conditions; on the construction of government buildings, but failure to complete schools and public utilities and the expectation that new residents build their own homes.]

RFE/RL's Turkmen Service listeners say the government offers no financial reward for leaving everything behind and moving to this desert area. They say they are only given an opportunity to get a bank loan of some 50 million manats (\$3,300). Dashoguz region residents say that officials offered a vague legal explanation for the forceful relocations. They reportedly said that all territory within 500 meters of the Uzbek border must be cleared, according to the law.

[Passages omitted: on the similarities of the current settlement program to the old Soviet "virgin lands" settlement programs and past dictator Saparmurat Niyazov's initiatives to relocate populations to develop desert areas; on the exile of dissidents to remote regions, including Sazak Begmedov, father of Tajigul, and several governors who had fallen from favor, as well as ethnic Uzbeks targeted after the alleged assassination attempt on Niyazov in 2002.]

[Passages omitted: on reports by Amnesty International and the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights calling on the EU on the eve of the human rights dialogue with Turkmenistan; on Begmedova's comment that Western media has been overly optimistic about reforms only anticipated, and the need for citizens to demand their constitutional rights.]

d. Former Turkmen Ambassador to Ukraine Jailed

Source: gundogar.org/06/20/08. Translation and synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project
Full version: <http://www.gundogar.org/?022500000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: Turkmenistan's former ambassador to Ukraine, Arslan Nepesov, was arrested in Ashgabat and sentenced to seven years in prison, opposition website gundogar.org reported, citing sources within Turkmenistan. No further details were available about the reasons for Nepesov's arrest.

Nepesov was dismissed from his post as Turkmenistan's envoy to Ukraine on March 18 for "grave shortcomings in work," and under a separate decree issued by President Berdymukhamedov, he was stripped of the rank of ambassador, gundogar.org reported.

Previously, Nepesov served as the head of Turkmenistan's pharmaceutical association, the trade and industry chamber, the Turkmenhaly [carpets] state corporation, the State Committee on Tourism and Sports and the National Olympics Committee. In February 2007, he was appointed Turkmenistan's envoy to Ukraine but served only one year.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Turkmenistan Demands Higher Price for TAPI Gas

Source: *financialexpress.com*. Synopsis by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/Turkmenistan-demands-higher-price-for-TAPI-gas/324557/>

Synopsis: Negotiations to build the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline have stalled over Turkmenistan's demand for a higher gas price, *financialexpress.com* reported. India offered a price of \$200-230/1,000 cubic meters (cm), but Turkmenistan has demanded \$400-\$450/1,000 cm, a price it is reportedly seeking from Russia as well, the Indian website reported.

Unnamed sources told *financialexpress.com* that Turkmenistan is saying it has enough potential buyers for its gas, and seeks higher prices from Russia and Iran in 2009. China is also expected to buy up to 100 bcm annually. The sources added that Turkmenistan warned that if no agreement was reached on TAPI, other projects would replace it. The target date for completion of the pipeline has been moved from 2014 to 2015, and Turkmenistan has said that certification of its gas reserves expected in September 2008 will back up claims that it can deliver to TAPI.

India has rejected the price hike, saying transit charges would make its own export and domestic prices non-competitive. No information was available on the prices offered by Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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